

Preventing Fires In The Home

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October is fire prevention month and the major focus this year is preventing fires in the home. The State Fire Marshals Office data the department received highlighting fires in Middlesex County during 2007 is worth noting. According to the data there were 7 fatal fires in Middlesex County in 2007. Smoking materials and the failure of smoke detectors to function properly were the leading causes of these deaths. A total of 2,514 fires occurred and 80% of the fires in Middlesex County took place in the home. Unsafe cooking was the leading cause of residential fires. Unattended cooking and other unsafe practices accounted for 58% of all residential fires. Smoke detectors operated in only 62% of the residential fires reported. Lastly, rescue and emergency medical service calls accounted for over one half of all responses reported by fire departments in 2007.

Things You Can Do To be Safe

- **Test your smoke detectors.** Working smoke detectors will provide you with an early warning in case of fire. The few minutes of early warning may be the difference between life and death. Have your fire alarm system serviced by a qualified service company. If your smoke detectors are more than 10 years old they should be replaced.
- **Plan and practice a fire exit drill.** Know two ways out of each room, especially since most deaths occur at night while you are sleeping. Make an escape plan and be sure each member of your family is familiar with it. After your plan is complete, practice. Have a designated meeting area so you know if everyone is out. Once you are out do not go back in!
- **Install carbon monoxide detectors** on each living level and on the level with bedrooms make sure one is within 10 feet of each bedroom door. The installation of carbon monoxide detectors in homes is required by law.
- **Practice fire safety in the kitchen.** The majority of home fires start in the kitchen. Be sure pan handles on the stove are turned in so they will not be bumped or touched by small children. Do not wear loose clothing when cooking. If a fire starts in a pan, simply smother it with a lid. Do not pour water on a grease fire. Have a fire extinguisher in your kitchen that is rated for all types of fires. Never leave your cooking unattended; fires start and spread quickly. Keep your cooking areas clean and grease free.
- **Heating equipment** requires regular maintenance to insure safety and comfort. Have your furnace cleaned and serviced each year by a qualified technician. Keep space heaters at a safe distance from combustible materials such as papers, curtains, bedding, clothing, etc. Have your fireplace or woodstove flue cleaned at least once each year before the heating season. A woodstove or pellet stove installation requires a building permit and inspection.
- **Appliances can cause fires.** Never leave your dryer running when you leave your home. Be sure to always clean the lint trap and check the exhaust hose for lint build up. Keep appliances that can get hot like toaster ovens and hot plates

away from combustible materials. Unplug these appliances when you are not using them.

- **Electricity is another dangerous hazard.** Check all electrical cords for fraying or loose connections. Replace damaged cords immediately before using them. Do not overload outlets or extension cords. Electrical wires can get very hot and start a fire. If your fuse blows or your circuit breaker trips find out why it happened before resetting or replacing it. Correct or repair the problem first. Call a licensed electrician when indicated. Protect young children from electrical shock by placing plastic outlet covers in receptacles that are not in use.
- **Match and lighter safety.** Purchase child resistant lighters. Keep all matches and lighters out of the reach and sight of children. A high locked cabinet is recommended. Teach children that matches and lighters are not toys, they are tools for grown-ups. Never give a lighter to a child as a toy. Teach young children to tell a grown-up when they see matches or lighters lying around.
- **Stop small fires before they become big!** Fire extinguishers can help prevent a small fire from becoming a big fire. Keep an approved fire extinguisher on hand in case of a small fire. If a fire starts in your home, you can try to put it out with your extinguisher, however you or someone else should still call the fire department (911) to be safe. All fire extinguishers should be checked each year and recharged if necessary.

Don't become a statistic. Practice fire safety in your home to prevent fires. Protect your memories and the ones you love. For more information on home fire safety go to the website of the National Fire Protection Association at www.firepreventionweek.org and click on Fact Sheets & Safety Tips.

